

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 144

Ezekiel 29-30

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Episode Summary

Ezekiel 29-30 are the first two of four chapters that preserve a series of oracles against Egypt and her Pharaoh. As in the case of the oracles against the prince of Tyre, Ezekiel's imagery of cosmic, non-human forces of chaos that resist God's order frames Yahweh's judgment of the hubris of Egypt. This episode therefore pays special attention to chaos and Leviathan imagery while referencing other symbols and metaphors that juxtapose Egypt's deserved demise and Israel's future restoration.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 144: Ezekiel chapters 29 and 30. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Pretty good, pretty good. What's new, Trey?

TS: Same old, same old. Got the Superbowl coming up.

MH: That's true.

TS: Excited about that. Sorry about your Packers losing a while back.

MH: (laughing) Yeah, I'm sorry about the Cowboys, too.

TS: Yeah, that was a rough pill to swallow. But that's okay... that's the life of sports.

MH: I actually have more substantive news than that. We need to give a shout-out to David Burnette. David called me earlier today and he got into Marquette University, into their doctoral program. He has his expenses paid, so they're covering his tuition and give him a little money to live off of. That's really what you want as a doctoral student, to get your expenses covered and get into a really

good program. He's still waiting on a couple other responses from grad schools, but I'm going to plug Marquette here. I just think that would be the best place for him to land. It's got great scholars in pseudepigrapha and other Second Temple literature. David wants to do New Testament and Second Temple period, and to me that just seems like a no-brainer. So congratulations to him!

TS: Congratulations, David! That's awesome.

MH: Yep. Absolutely. He was thrilled, to say the least (laughs). It's a long process.

TS: So he'll be moving from Texas to Marquette... Wisconsin, maybe?

MH: It's the Milwaukee area. I think the term starts in August. I presume that's where he'll end up. That was really, really high on his wish list. So, like I said, he was excited. He called me and said he got in! Yeah, I think we can expect good things for him and from him out of that program—on this podcast anyway. We've talked about the work of Amy Richter (the genealogies of Jesus and the Watchers)... she's a Marquette grad. That's where she did her doctoral work. Tyler Stewart (Galatians 3 and 4 and just whose sin are we talking about—the backdrop of the Watchers there in Paul)... another Marquette person. They do a lot of good work. You'll go to SBL and their doctoral students do some real interesting stuff. I think it's a great place to land.

TS: He's not going to turn into a Packer fan by going there, is he? Is that, like, one of the prerequisites?

MH: (laughing) One can only hope! I don't think it's a rule to graduate. It wasn't a rule in Madison, it just sort of happens. The people who think clearly wind up Packer fans.

TS: You just fell down one day on the ice and bumped your head and you woke up a Packer fan.

MH: Right. Something like that.

TS: Well, Mike, switching gears here. I got a lot of good response about our last episode. As predicted, it was a favorite of most—getting into the details of textual criticism. That was fun. Don't forget that I created a Facebook page for Naked Bible Podcast. There are a bunch of people on there liking that and talking about it. So if you want a place to talk about the episodes, go to the Facebook page and meet up with people and talk about it.

MH: I should say something, too. I don't know if I plug the newsletter enough, but I'm going to plug it again here. If you have not signed up for my newsletter, you really need to do that. Just go to drmsb.com and right there on the right hand

5:00

side you'll see something about "Subscribe to Mike's newsletter." Do that because in this next newsletter (I think it will be toward the weekend, wherever that lands in relation to when this episode airs)... There will be a few things announced in there: new projects and something very specific that has to do with filming things and TV... And then there will be some other things in there about how the publisher of *Unseen Realm* (Lexham Press) is starting things on our end to get new people introduced to *Unseen Realm* content. You might think that doesn't really apply to you because you've already read the book, but it actually does because you can participate in the discussion groups that they are creating online to help people understand the content. You can field questions if you like, defend me from heresy (laughs) and that sort of thing. The details of that will be in the newsletter, and also there's going to be a survey that I'm going to post the link to in the newsletter that deals with... It's something to help me and the publisher get some direction on what I should be writing next. So you need to subscribe to the newsletter. I'm not always going to be either interested in or able (allowed to) post things on the blog itself, but the newsletter is really the place for this sort of thing. So please subscribe to the newsletter. Go to drmsb.com and click on the link and go through the few seconds it takes to subscribe, and you'll get access to more information than is going to be living on the website for everybody.

TS: We've got some good things in store for 2017. Hopefully they will materialize and work out, but 2017 could be a good year, Mike.

MH: Yep. And that's also the place to keep up with the translation project for *Supernatural* and other things Miqlat is involved in. The video thing is going to be a Miqlat partnership with another nonprofit. I don't give all those details just randomly online. That's the kind of thing a newsletter is for, and that's what we're using it for.

TS: Mike, also I don't know if you're aware, but last night I actually ordered your *Reversing Hermon* book on skywatchtv.com, where they've got you bundled in with Derek Gilbert's new book coming out. Your book was there, and I saw it on Amazon, too. So your *Reversing Hermon* book is available for preorder now.

MH: I knew about the book. A couple people have emailed me with, "Hey, I preordered your book!" and I was like, "Really? How'd you do that?" (laughs) So I had to go up and look. I saw the book there, but I wasn't aware that the bundle... I knew they were going to do a bundle because we did the Skywatch TV promotional segments (that, of course, was part of that). But wow, that's good! I didn't know the bundle itself was available for preorder. So moving along!

TS: Yeah. That was the first time I actually got to see the book cover, so that's always fun.

MH: Well, as of a couple days ago, I handed in what I think is the last round of copy editing for that. So they're still on target for the March 7 date. That's the day the book should be actually available for purchase. But right now they're doing preorders. It's still on track, as far as I know, for March 7.

TS: On Amazon here it says March 24 for paperback.

MH: I don't know. Having lived through the "moveable date problem" with *Unseen Realm* (laughing), I don't know who generates the dates or what they mean, but I was told the 7th. We'll find out.

TS: Absolutely. And it's available for preorder, so you might as well go get it if y'all are interested.

MH: Right. Please don't email me for clarification because what you just heard is what I know. That's all I know! (laughing)

TS: There you go. All right, Mike. We're doing two chapters today in Ezekiel. Is that correct?

MH: Yep—29 and 30.

TS: Egypt.

MH: Yep, Egypt. These are the first two of four chapters directed against Egypt in this section (the oracles against the nations). Again, just like we had with Tyre—we had these sort of two warm-up chapters until we got to Ezekiel 28, which is the one everybody's really interested in. We had 26 and 27 talking about the fall of Tyre, and then in 28 the prince of Tyre with all the stuff that's involved in that. It's going to be the same deal here. We've got 29 and 30, and in many respects, they're sort of warm-up chapters to 31 and 32. There's really some odd and unusual images in 31 and 32 that take us right into (potentially, at least) divine council stuff and Sheol and the *rephaim* and possibly *nephilim* and all that sort of thing. So I know there are people out there in the audience who can't wait to get to 31 and 32, just like they couldn't wait to get to 28. But we've gotta do these warm-up chapters in 29 and 30. And there's some real interesting things here, too. Maybe not the bulk of material will be in this sweet spot, but there are some things. But when we hit these two chapters, most of what I'll say is sort of in chapter 29 and then there's going to be a few things in chapter 30 to kind of mop up with as far as comment. But, as is our habit here, [00:10:00] we don't do verse by verse. We just try to focus on things that are interesting. So that's what we're going to do here.

Let's just jump into chapter 29 and I'll read the first five verses just to get the ball rolling here.

10:00

In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; ³ speak, and say, Thus says the Lord God:

“Behold, I am against you,
Pharaoh king of Egypt,
the great dragon that lies
in the midst of his streams,
that says, ‘My Nile is my own;
I made it for myself.’

⁴ I will put hooks in your jaws,
and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales;
and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams,
with all the fish of your streams
that stick to your scales.

⁵ And I will cast you out into the wilderness,
you and all the fish of your streams;
you shall fall on the open field,
and not be brought together or gathered.

To the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the heavens
I give you as food.

There are a couple of things in here that are noteworthy, I think (one in particular). If you're used to my content at all (even going way back to reading the early drafts of what I then called the "Myth" book that became *The Unseen Realm*), you're going to be able to pick out a few things probably already, just by virtue of the English wording. The reference to Pharaoh being referred to as a "great dragon"... The Hebrew word lurking behind the English "dragon" there is *tannim*. It comes from the lemma *tannin*, and that should be a familiar term if you've been exposed at all to what we call in Old Testament study the "chaos symbolism" or mythology. The whole Ancient Near Eastern idea (and ancient Israel had its own perspective and view of this)... It's the notion of primeval chaos, or all the opposition to the kind of order that God (in Israel's case) or the gods (in the Ancient Near Eastern case) wanted to create so that earth would be habitable for human beings. So the forces of chaos are really anything that opposes that or gets in the way or disrupts it or causes upheaval on earth. Well, *tannin* and the plural here, *tannim*, is important.

The reference to the Nile is important. We'll get to why in a few moments. But here we have Pharaoh cast as this great dragon in the midst of his streams claiming that "the Nile is my own." And then we have a reference to the fish being

stuck to the scales of the great dragon. If Pharaoh is the dragon, then the fish are the people. Basically, the whole point here in the first five verses is that Pharaoh is going to get judged and the people of Egypt are going to get judged along with him. It's not just him, it's everybody.

The typical explanation for this reference to *tannim* is that we're talking about a crocodile because of the Egyptian context. That's perfectly understandable; that's coherent. But what I'm going to suggest to you (and again, it's not just me—it's lots of Old Testament scholarship here) is that there's more than just drawing an analogy to a creature that we know as the crocodile. That description and that picture in someone's head in the ancient world and the terminology being used here is really going to be much more loaded. There are going to be certain concepts that glom on to this description that are very abstract and a whole lot more important than just some sort of zoological observation.

15:00

Now, incidentally, the Hebrew word for "Nile" is *yeor*. It's actually an Egyptian word. So we obviously have a descriptive context and we also have a linguistic context here for Egypt. The Egyptian loan word for "river" (specifically the Nile) is *ytrw*. From the 18th dynasty onwards or so, it gets spelled without the "t," so you get *yrrw*. There's a very close relationship there, so this is actually considered by scholars to be an Egyptian loan word—the term that's used here for Nile. But the really important thing to notice here is not the river itself, even though (think about it) for the Egyptian, the Nile was everything. The regular flow of the Nile, the regular flooding of the Nile, was the thing that kept the people alive. It enabled civilization to exist in Egypt because as the Nile floods annually (and it does every year) and the water spills out onto either side of the river, it not only makes agriculture possible, but makes it really *abundantly* possible. It's really where the Egyptians are going to get their food supply, so they depend on the regular flooding of the Nile—the timing of it, the planting, the harvesting—the whole agricultural cycle really depends on this. In other words, the Nile became a symbol for them of order. The gods gave Egypt the Nile. The gods instilled this order in their civilization. It enables their civilization. Pharaoh is the one who is supposed to regulate all this because he's the Horus on earth. He's the god-king on earth.

Just a little sidebar here, oftentimes the "intermediate periods" in Egypt... If you ever studied Egyptian history you know you have different kingdoms (Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, so on and so forth) and then in between them you have intermediate periods. The intermediate periods are when there's chaos in the land. Scholars (people who study soil and geology and climatology and what-not) have marshaled a lot of evidence that it was during these periods that you had drought. The Nile didn't do what it was supposed to do. It disrupted the cycle. And the Pharaoh always got blamed for that because he was the one who was supposed to be regulating this. So the intermediate periods would be periods where you'd have more than one Pharaoh. You'd have rivals rise up and a different important household, family, or extended family in

Egypt would assert their authority and say, "We're going to be the Pharaoh now. We're going to kill this guy off or just start our little sub-kingdom over here." And you actually have multiple Pharaohs at different times in the intermediate periods, and just lots of chaos and conflict—civil war in a number of situations. It really goes back to the regularity of this. While for the Egyptian, the Nile was a symbol of order (the Egyptian term for this would be *maat*, the divinely imposed order, the thing that makes life possible and good that the gods control), for the biblical writers and for Yahweh, Yahweh looks at it as, "No—you're the thing that gets in the way. You're the thing that has been disruptive to my people and my plans. You've been an enemy." So there's this inverted way of looking at Pharaoh and the Nile from the Israelite perspective that's sort of lurking in the background here.

With that bit of an introduction, let's get into the abstract stuff. You have several things in the passage that sort of scream to scholars this symbolic mytho-poetic sort of context for what's going on here. Number one, you have the proximity of this material to Ezekiel 28. Here we are right in the next chapter. And you had plenty of cosmic references to various divine stories from Canaan and a few other parts, too. But you have a very clear mytho-poetic bent in Ezekiel 28 that says, "Hey, we're talking about a historical figure here, but lurking in the background are these religious/theological things that have to do with the divine council and cosmic rebellion and all this stuff." So you have here chapter 29 right on the heels of that, and we've seen this in other places in the book of Ezekiel, but that's one thing that leads scholars to think, "Okay, we're just getting more of the same, it's just that now it's directed against Egypt. Before it was the prince of Tyre, now it's against Egypt." You also have chapters 31 and 32 following this, which will make it abundantly clear that there's something going on there in this kind of mytho-poetic cosmic worldview sort of thing. So the fact that here you have chapter 29 right between those two things causes scholars to think that the context argues for this.

Secondly, the word *tannim* (lemma *tannin*) is important. We'll see in a moment why because I'm going to take you to some other passages. Third, the line about the hook in the jaw is important because it's going to show up in other passages where the great dragon (leviathan, who is called *tannim*) is going to be discussed. Leviathan is perhaps the most well-known chaos symbol in antiquity. Fourth, the notion of being cast into the wilderness to be given as food for land-dwelling animals and birds is another thing that pops up in episodes or passages where leviathan is discussed. When leviathan is judged, he is handed over to the other beasts so they can pick its carcass—that kind of thing. So those four observations... When scholars read these first five verses, those things just scream to them, "We're going to have some sort of mytho-poetic context here, some sort of wider abstract religious worldview at work in this passage." It's not just going to be, "Hey, there's a crocodile! We're just going to take that big beast and we're going to analogize Pharaoh to that thing." It's more than zoology here.

20:00

So let's talk about *tannim*, and of course the lemma is *tannin*. It appears in Deuteronomy 32:33, for instance. I'll just read it to you.

³³ **their wine is the poison of serpents
and the cruel venom of asps.**

If you cut out to that passage, the word there for "serpents" is *tannim* (*tanninim*, in that case). Here you have a parallel. You have this word for "dragon" in parallel with another word clearly for serpent. In that case, it's going to be the asp, which is a different term than *nachash*. In this case, *peten* is the lemma—a common word for a serpent, an asp-type of snake in the Bible. But you have, again, the dragon in parallel with this particular snake. So it could be (and often is) that "dragon" here would have been conceived by the ancient person as a serpent-like creature. The serpentine idea is clear from the encounter with the Egyptian magicians. Remember Moses and Aaron go in before Pharaoh and confront him in Exodus 7:9ff. If we read verse 9, we have God saying to Moses:

⁹ **"When Pharaoh says to you, 'Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'"**

Believe it or not, that's *tannim* right there. Same thing for verse 12 of the same chapter (the confrontation with Pharaoh). So this dragon term of which everybody says, "that's a crocodile because it lives in the Nile," well... okay. It could be; it might be. There's not just one description of the great sea creature that is the symbol of chaos (the symbol of hostility to Yahweh's good order). There's no one way of telegraphing that. But in some of these, there is a very distinct serpentine flavor to the context. I'm harping on this for a specific reason that I'll mention in a bit.

Tannim is also used of saltwater creatures (Job 7:12), so it's not always fresh water. We read here:

¹² **Am I the sea, or a sea monster,
that you set a guard over me?**

Sea monster in the ESV is *tannim*. I'm going to go to Isaiah 51:9, where I think the most significant connection here is made, because this is going to help us go to a couple other passages. In Isaiah 51:9, we're talking about this dragon motif. This is what people in the ancient world would have thought when they either hear preached or they read *tannim* in a text. They're going to be thinking some very specific things that relate to just why the world is the way it is. Why is it chaotic? Why is there upheaval? Why is there disorder? Surely God wouldn't make the world this way on purpose! Well, there are forces at work against the

way God wants it to be, and that's where you get the concept of chaos. So in Isaiah 51:9, we read this:

**⁹Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the LORD;
awake, as in days of old,
the generations of long ago.
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
who pierced the dragon?**

Again, note the parallel there. "Dragon" (tannim) is in parallel to Rahab. Verse 10:

**¹⁰Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep,
who made the depths of the sea a way
for the redeemed to pass over?**

Obviously, that's a reference to the Exodus—crossing over the great deep. Well, the great deep here is where the dragon lived. It's where Rahab lived. In Isaiah 51, God is judging Rahab—he's judging the dragon by drying up the sea. If you take that back to Ezekiel 29, we have the dragon in the Nile and God says in verse 5 that, "I'm going to cast you out into the wilderness, you and all the fish in your stream. I'm going to empty that thing out and you're going to be essentially put on dry land. The beasts of the earth and the birds of the heavens are going to pick your carcass" and that sort of thing. So keep all these things in mind. Let's go to Isaiah 30:7.

**⁷Egypt's help is worthless and empty;
therefore I have called her
"Rahab who sits still."**

Again, Rahab is the same word as in Isaiah 51, where it's paralleled with the dragon. It's part of the matrix of terms that speak of chaos. What's the point of God making fun of Egypt here by calling her "Rahab who sits still?" Basically he's saying, "You don't have the power to do anything. You're not a threat. You might as well just sit on your butt over there in the corner because you're not doing anything. You're sort of feckless or useless. You're *impotent*." That's the idea. "You're not active. You're not a force to be reckoned with."

Let's go to Psalm 89, a divine council passage.

**⁵Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!**

- ⁶For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings [*bene elim*] is like the LORD,
⁷a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,
and awesome above all who are around him?
⁸O LORD God of hosts,
who is mighty as you are, O LORD,
with your faithfulness all around you? [MH: could also be translated “faithful
ones” all around you, in a council reference]
⁹You rule the raging of the sea;

You are greater than the powers of chaos. The sea and the creatures living in it (like this great sea monster/dragon/super sea serpent kind of thing)—those were symbols of something *not* under control. Why? Because the sea was unmanageable. It was unpredictable and threatening. But the Lord (God) is stronger than the sea. He is the one who calms the waters. He's the one in control of them. He is the one who puts the sea under restraint in the creation narratives. So verse 9 again of Psalm 89:

- ⁹You rule the raging of the sea;
when its waves rise, you still them.
¹⁰You crushed Rahab like a carcass;
you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.
¹¹The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours;
the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.
¹²The north and the south, you have created them;
Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.
¹³You have a mighty arm;
strong is your hand, high your right hand.
¹⁴Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;
steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

Here you have a reference to the God of the council (Yahweh, the Lord of the council) subduing, crushing, and bringing into restraint Rahab (the great sea beast, the forces of chaos). He stills the sea, he stills the waves, and he crushes Rahab like a carcass. Psalm 74:

- ¹²Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.
¹³You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the sea monsters [*tannim*] on the waters.
¹⁴You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

30:00

Right there it is: the same kind of language that we see right here in Ezekiel 29, where God is judging, God is crushing, God is destroying. There are a number of words here. Again, God is overpowering the *tannim*. He is overpowering Leviathan. He is mightier than the forces who work against him. The way this is portrayed in biblical thinking is the "raging sea." This is the primary metaphor for all of the forces that frighten us, threaten us, oppose the order that God imposed in creation. When there are problems, it's viewed as sort of an eruption of the forces of nature. Again, this is why when you had natural disaster or thing like this, it was viewed in cosmic terms—that this is just symptomatic of the fact (catch this)... All this bad stuff that happens in the natural world (like natural disasters) reminds us of the threat and fearsomeness of the world we live in. It just reminds us that our world is not Eden. Our world is not the way God originally wanted it to be.

Now, I think it's significant that the imagery for a lot of this is a dragon—that it's *tannim*, that it's Leviathan, that it's Rahab (the great beast). In later Jewish literature, Rahab is going to be viewed as the counterpart to Leviathan. In other words, Leviathan is the sea image for chaos and Rahab is going to be viewed as a land beast that has the same metaphorical value. It's not completely clear-cut here, but that's the way later Jewish material will take it (like in the Second Temple period). Be that as it may, I think it's important to notice that the metaphors that are really crucially involved here are these dragon, serpent, and Leviathan ones. Why? Well, I don't think it's a coincidence that back in Genesis 3, when you have the initial disruption of God's good world, when you have divine rebellion and you have human rebellion... Of course, human rebellion is prompted by an initial divine rebellion by the *nachash* (which can also be taken as "serpent" or "shining one," the one who dispenses divine information—all those apply in Genesis 3). But I think the fact that the writer latches onto "serpent" imagery is not coincidental because serpent imagery in the bigger picture... You have the waters that are stilled in the early verses of Genesis. And again, I'm not arguing that *tehom* is Tiamat (the Babylonian sea monster that Marduk has to slay to bring order into the world). Obviously, it would fit if that were the case, and scholars have made that case in the past. It's probably a better way to go if you take *tehom* there as being Ugaritic in flavor because that is the abyss—that's the great deep where Leviathan lives. It's the same idea, but the question lies in the point of origin.

But I don't think it's coincidence to cast the divine rebel in serpentine form in a way that would be familiar to people in the ancient world that would think, "Uh-oh, this is going to turn out badly because when these guys are in the picture and when we clearly know it's supernatural because snakes just don't talk. We know that something is afoot here. We know that this is going to be an enemy of God and God's world and the order that God wants for the humans to carry out the dominion mandate to make the rest of the world like this wonderful place called Eden. Something is afoot here, and it isn't good." I don't think that's coincidence.

Dick Averbeck has done some interesting work here, relating the Leviathan imagery with the Genesis 3 imagery. I will try to remember to put that up for people who are interested in that. I think I have a copy of his paper. It's been awhile since I looked at it. If I do, I'll post it. It was a conference paper that was later published. But catch the point here—there's a certain logic to portraying the divine enemy in this way because the serpent becomes a symbol of disorder, disruption, adversarial hostility to the way God wants things. That is not an accident. In fact, if you go to Isaiah 27:1, this is an eschatological passage:

In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

35:00 Guess what word is "dragon" there? You guessed it! It's *tannim*. And the fleeing serpent there is *nachash*. The twisting serpent is also *nachash*. This passage (in fact, a lot of this verbiage here and in Psalm 74) is right out of the Canaanite material about the same thing—the forces of chaos, the battle of Leviathan. Here's the larger point here for our purposes in Ezekiel 29. If this is the loaded backdrop against which people would naturally read Ezekiel 29... When they see Pharaoh and he's the dragon and the Nile and he's going to be destroyed and his carcass is going to be out there to get picked and all this kind of stuff, the literate Israelite who is familiar with the wider worldview that they're in (both Egyptian and Canaanite and just general Near-Eastern imagery because the imagery is not just isolated to one or two places), they're going to naturally read between the lines here and they're going to see how Pharaoh is being cast as the great chaos enemy. He's like other chaos enemies, like Leviathan, like the *nachash* of Genesis 3, like this or that, these passages that we read. Ezekiel 29 is going to be part of that whole matrix of divine rebellion motifs.

I'm belaboring this point for a specific reason. Why is it that if... Again, nobody fights about this stuff when it comes to Ezekiel 29. Why is it that we fight about it when it comes to Ezekiel 28? Again, I'm pointing this out to draw attention *again* to what I think is a great inconsistency with how Ezekiel 28 is handled. I'm not going to drift back into that (you can listen to the previous episode). I'm not one who says Ezekiel 28 is all about comparing the prince of Tyre to Adam. I think it's about comparing the prince of Tyre to a divine rebel, and I think that's very consistent with what went before and now what's going to come after. Because it's not going to be just chapter 29 (with its transparent chaos mythology themes). It's not just chapter 29, it's going to be 31 and 32. We're going to get it over again. This whole section (these parts of the oracles against the nations) are casting the nations as forces of chaos. It's linking the nations back to the original time of chaos—back in the garden when all that was right was disrupted, when it all just gets blown up. It's casting the rebellion, the disobedience, the antipathy of the nations against God's people and against Yahweh himself. It's casting all of that in the same light. And therefore, this material needs to be read against this

common backdrop. You don't just intrude into all of that (all of this cosmic upheaval, this war against God) and say that in this chapter it's about Adam. That's just hopelessly inconsistent. But again, I'll get off my hobby horse here. Let's go back to Ezekiel 29. I want to say a few more things about this just to give you a flavor for it. I want to read just a little section here from the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery about the sea and about the dragon, and then we'll move onto some other things here. This source says this from the entry on the word "sea:"

The cosmic sea, however, also symbolizes the continued threat the forces of chaos pose against God and creation. The sea pushes against the boundaries God established for it (Job 38:8–11; Jer 5:22). The Bible adapts its neighbors' creation myths of a primeval battle between a creator god and a sea monster of chaos called Leviathan, Rahab, or the dragon or serpent (Job 41). Unlike the myths of neighboring nations, God creates the chaos monster and places it in the sea (Gen 1:20–21; Ps 104:24–26). The monster stirs the cosmic sea but is wounded and subdued by God (Job 26:12; Ps 74:12–14; 89:9–10; Is 51:9) and will ultimately be vanquished in the end times (Is 27:1). As the home of the chaos monster who can be roused, the sea symbolizes the threat of the reemergence of chaos (Job 3:8). In fact, the evil world powers and the antichrist of the last days which oppose God and his people are symbolized as beasts arising from the sea (Dan 7:3; Rev 13:1).

40:00

Again, that is not a coincidence. This is part of how this concept (the concept of the forces of chaos against God's good order, against God's wish that the world would be what it was originally intended to be... it would be Edenic. This orderly Kingdom of God on earth, where God's children (humans) are part of the family and are happy and productive. All of that is contrasted in this way, and so it's no coincidence that the great enemy of the end—the great eschatological enemy—would be cast in the same way: a beast that arises from the sea. And the antichrist is called "The Beast!" These things are deliberate, they're intentional, they are put there in the text (Old or New Testament) by the writer with the presumption that you're going to know what the language means. Back to the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery:

As Creator, God controls the sea, both producing and calming its waves (Is 51:15; Jer 31:35), and keeping it within its boundaries (Job 38:8–11; Prov 8:27–29; Jer 5:22). He can dry up the sea at will (Nahum 1:4) or unleash it to judge the world as in the flood (Gen 6–8). Thus the threat of chaos and evil which the sea symbolizes is ultimately hollow. [MH: because it's under God's authority] The parting of the Red Sea and destruction of Pharaoh is a reenactment of the subduing of the sea and chaos monster, once more demonstrating God's ultimate authority over forces of chaos and evil (Ex 15; Is 51:9–10). This same authority is symbolized by Jesus' walking on the sea [MH: I'd like to add that he's basically wiping his feet on it!] (Mk 6:45–52) and calming the sea (Mk 4:35–41). Even the

beast of Revelation which arises from the sea is subdued and cast into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20).

The throne room of God contains something like a sea of glass which may refer to the cosmic sea (Rev 4:6; 15:2). The calmness of the sea symbolizes the absence of evil and chaos in heaven, for there is no “monster” of chaos able to disturb it. At the consummation, the cosmic sea is mingled with fire, perhaps a symbol of impending judgment (Rev 15:2). After the consummation there is no longer a sea (Rev 21:1), which symbolizes no more actual or possible threat to the creation and sovereignty of God.

I would say there is no more threat to the new global Eden. Everything comes full circle. In light of all that (what I've said and what DBI says), you read Ezekiel 29 and the judgment of Pharaoh is a reenactment of the judgment way back in Moses' day—the conquest of the sea for God's people. And even deeper than that, it's a reenactment or rehearsal of the idea that God is the one who is mightier than the forces of chaos. God will defeat Pharaoh, who is the dragon, who says “the Nile is my own”... “Well, actually, Pharaoh, it isn't your own! Actually, Pharaoh, it's not you who is in control of it. Your nice little ordered world is about to be turned upside-down because I view *you* as a force against *me*, and I'm going to deal with that force. Again, people in the ancient world would have picked up on the messaging very readily, but for us it takes a little bit of work.

Now a little side-note here about 29:3 that's kind of interesting. When we read “My Nile [or the Nile] is my own; I made it for myself,” the reading “I made it for myself” is actually based on texts other than the Masoretic Text, like the Septuagint. The Masoretic Text says “My Nile is my own; I made myself.” If you just go with the Masoretic Text, it's actually a claim of self-creation. Why is that important? Because Atum-Re (the high god of Egypt who is supposed to be the one ruling in line with the Pharaoh) claimed to be self-created. And God's like, “Well, let's just find out how powerful you are! Let's just illustrate who's really the ultimate power here!” And there are some textual issues. If we go with that Masoretic Text (I'll just give you a “for instance” here), it's the only occurrence, according to Bauer-Leander's well-known lexicon, of a reflexive form with the suffix. They look at that and say maybe the translations really did read something else. So maybe it's not the original text, but if it is, this “I made myself” idea is very consistent with what an Egyptian would have been thinking because of Atum-Re. Let's just work through the rest of the passage real quickly because I want to get to something else in particular in chapter 30 here.

45:00

In the next few verses (6-9), Egypt is a broken reed. When God says:

“Because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel, ⁷when they grasped you with the hand, you broke and tore all their shoulders...”

Basically, "The Israelites leaned on you and you weren't any help. In fact, you were destructive." If you want to go through the verses there, the whole point is that Egypt is not someone to be trusted. They are not reliable. It is a broken reed and it fails everybody who trusts her. It's an indictment. We have here that Egypt will be made a desolation in verses 10-15. We have a specific reference to 40 years. Verse 13:

¹³“For thus says the Lord God: At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered, ¹⁴and I will restore the fortunes of Egypt and bring them back to the land of Pathros, the land of their origin, and there they shall be a lowly kingdom. ¹⁵It shall be the most lowly of the kingdoms, and never again exalt itself above the nations.

Basically, Ezekiel is saying that Egypt is going to have a bit of comeback, but it will never be what it was. Scholars have been interested in the 40 years here because 40 is a very common symbolic number. Taylor writes here:

In terms of literal fulfilment these threats never became reality: Egypt never endured an exile as Judah did. But her subsequent history has consisted of repeated conquest and humiliation.

So he's actually saying it's not just restricted to 40 years. Ezekiel is prophesying that Egypt is going to get trashed—and they do by Nebuchadnezzar. That's the immediate context. And from that point on, they never really recover. They go through, not just 40 years, but centuries of "Well, we're still here, but somebody else is a threat now." Somebody else takes over. This is the period where you're going to have foreigners become Pharaohs. We had a period earlier where you have Semites that become Pharaohs during one of the intermediate periods, and that factors into the whole discussion of biblical chronology. But afterwards, you actually have Persians in one instance and Libyans become the Pharaoh over a united Egypt. They're not natural-born citizen Pharaohs; they are ruled from outside. They never recover from the set of circumstances that Ezekiel is talking about here.

In verses 17-21, we get a chronological reference.

¹⁷In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me:¹⁸“Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre. Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare, yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had performed against her.

We talked about the circumstances with Tyre—that eventually their royalty (their rulers) were actually sent off into exile to live in Babylon, and Tyre became a city

that functioned by tribute. Verse 19 in our present chapter, Ezekiel brings up Tyre and then says:

¹⁹Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...

So when Nebuchadnezzar shows up to face the Egyptians, he's going to be really irritated because of what happened at Tyre. It took a long time, they didn't completely destroy the city, but they did conquer it in the sense of a tribute situation and all that sort of stuff. Well, in Egypt's case, he's going to come off in verse 19... he will despoil it and plunder it. "It shall be the wages for his army." Basically, the loss that Nebuchadnezzar suffered in time and expense on Tyre—he's going to make up for it in Egypt. This doesn't bode well for the Egyptians. Verse 20:

²⁰I have given him the land of Egypt as his payment for which he labored, because they worked for me, declares the Lord God.

In the case of the reference back to Tyre, Taylor writes this:

Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre had lasted for thirteen years, and by the end of that time *every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare*, a graphic description of the chafing of helmets and the carrying of burdens for the siege-works.

It took so many years. Soldiers were suited up and helmeted for so long they started to lose their hair and their shoulders were rubbed raw because of having to carry siege works back and forth and all this stuff. It's just a reference to the duration and the frustration that Tyre put up in its resistance. Again, Nebuchadnezzar wins out in a tributary sense, but he's going to basically make up what he lost when he gets to Egypt. And that is not good news for the Egyptians. The chronological reference gives us a book. The reference that is actually given puts us at 571 B.C. It links the punishment of Egypt with that of Tyre a few years preceding that (when the Tyre campaign wrapped up). So it's the right time period and the picture here is consistent.

Last thing in chapter 29 that I want to say... In verse 21, God is speaking to the prophet:

²¹"On that day I will cause a horn to spring up for the house of Israel, and I will open your lips among them. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

50:00

For those of you who have some serious Bible under your belt, when you see the reference to the horn, you might be thinking of the messiah. It might be messianic, because you do get this language in passages like Psalm 132:17:

**¹⁷There I will make a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.**

There is horn language associated with the messiah. It could be a more general reference to the restoration of the Davidic dynasty (in other words, a return from exile). The people Ezekiel is with are in exile, so it could be a reference to the return of the Davidic dynasty back again to the homeland. Some scholars take it as a reference to Ezekiel's preaching about Israel's future restoration (linking those two ideas). So in essence, God says, "I'm going to judge Egypt. On that day when all this happens, I'm going to cause a horn to spring up for the house of Israel and you're going to start preaching about that. I will open your lips among them. So when I'm finished with Egypt, then we're going to turn our attention to the future of the people of God." And that's basically what happens in the rest of the book of Ezekiel, because we're going to have chapter 30, 31, and 32 that are still going to be about Egypt. Then in chapter 33 we're going to get the report that Jerusalem has fallen. In 34 we have the fallout of the report. And then, beginning with chapter 37, the rest of the book is about the restoration of Israel. So this verse might be a way of sort of telegraphing that historically we're about to get to the place where God says, "I'm going to start putting plans in motion to bring Israel back. And you're going to start preaching about it." That's probably the best general way to take it.

I want to read you a little bit about the horn, because to us it sounds really odd. What does a horn have to do with messiah? What does a horn have to do with David? It just doesn't make any sense. Well, there's a reason why it would have made sense with an ancient person. I'm going to go back to the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. I think it has a real good article on this and I'm going to give you a few excerpts from it. It says this:

The literal image of horn is of the animal horn as an effective defensive weapon. The Bible does not distinguish between horns and antlers, so horn refers to pointed bony structures on the heads of male sheep, goats, deer, cattle, oxen and so forth. They give the animal a regal look and provide such an impressive defense mechanism that their imagery was widely employed to represent power. The metaphorical value of the horn comes primarily from the fact that the size and condition of an animal's horns are indicative of its power, status [MH: it's grown to a certain point of maturity in the herd] and health....

In general, horn represents power or status in a social context. In Deuteronomy 33:17 Moses compares the tribes of Joseph to "a firstborn bull, [whose] horns are

the horns of a wild ox” because Ephraim and Manasseh were large and powerful. Therefore, “lifting up the horn” of someone means bestowing power, joy, health and prestige (Ps 92:10; 1 Sam 2:1).

You get references here like Psalm 92:10, which says:

¹⁰ **But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;
you have poured over me fresh oil.**

You've given me power; you've given me prestige. That's the point. 1 Samuel 2:1 says:

**“My heart exults in the LORD;
my horn is exalted in the LORD.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.**

55:00

Remember the context: the other women are making fun of her because she's barren. When she makes this vow and gets this promise about having a child, this is part of her prayer. "I'm going to get the strength, the health, to bear a child, and I'm going to have victory over my enemies." So even in her context as a woman who, of course, doesn't have any military position or anything like that, it's still viewed the same way. "We're going to give you the strength or power to overcome something—to be victorious over something. Back to the Dictionary:

Conversely, “cutting off the horn” is the removal of one’s power or influence (Ps 75:10; Jer 48:25).

¹⁰ **All the horns of the wicked I will cut off... Psalm 75:10**

The Psalmist wasn't saying, "Hey, those guys were fighting; they had horns. They were just weird animal creatures." No, the point is that, "I'm going to defeat the wicked. All the horns of the wicked I will cut off. I'm going to make them powerless. I'm going to take away their power. I'm going to take away their prestige. I'm going to take away their status."

Since God is the source of strength to those who trust in him, David declares, “The LORD is ... the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps 18:2 NIV par. 2 Sam

22:3). In Revelation 5:6 the lamb has seven horns-his kingly power is perfect. [MH: The number seven is significant. There's nothing lacking.]

By metonymy, horn came to symbolize those who had power: political or military. In Mesopotamian art, horns indicate deity and deified kings...

This is stock imagery in the ancient Near East. In Daniel 7 and 8, the horns represent succession of kings or multiple branches of military power. The book of Revelation picks up this kind of imagery. Both the dragon and the first beast in Revelation 12 and 13 have ten horns, which Revelation 17:12 explains as ten kings. We could go on and on, but you get the idea. This is an important biblical image that I wanted to camp on a little bit because you're going to encounter it elsewhere and people might wonder, "What's so big about a horn?" Again, this helps you understand the metaphor a little bit.

Let's go on to Ezekiel 30. There are one or two things I want to point out here in what remains of the episode. This is a lament for Egypt. It's just like we had in Ezekiel 26 and 27. We had the judgment of Tyre, then we had a lament for Tyre, and then we had the same thing for the prince of Tyre—two halves of Ezekiel 28. You get the judgment and then the lament. Well, here we have this judgment oracle in chapter 29 and now we have a lament in chapter 30 for Egypt.

The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God:

“Wail, ‘Alas for the day!’

**³ For the day is near,
the day of the LORD is near;
it will be a day of clouds,
a time of doom for the nations.**

**⁴ A sword shall come upon Egypt,
and anguish shall be in Cush,
when the slain fall in Egypt,
and her wealth is carried away,
and her foundations are torn down.**

Then he lists Cush, Put, Lud, Arabia, Libya... all the people of the land that are in league. These are geographical areas that surround and are in league with Egypt. They're basically under Egypt's sphere of dominion. They shall also fall with the Egyptians by the sword. So the whole chapter goes into this kind of language about what's going to happen to Egypt. Again, it's very familiar and very similar to what we've seen before with Tyre. In verse 13, there's something here that people might have a question about. It says:

¹³ **"Thus says the Lord God:**

"I will destroy the idols

and put an end to the images in Memphis;

there shall no longer be a prince from the land of Egypt;

so I will put fear in the land of Egypt.

1:00:00

This word "prince" is used here. It is the word *nasi*, which we have seen and people might remember from previous episodes or maybe Q&A's or something like that. It's one of the terms that can be used for divine beings (divine princes). I don't think in this case that we have here the judgment of the divine prince, the divine being over the land of Egypt. It think this is a reference to the Pharaoh. The reason I say that is because elsewhere in Scripture (like Isaiah 34 and 24), the judgment of the gods over the nations is something that is associated with the Day of the Lord. And, of course, when you get into the New Testament it's associated with the resurrection for that reason. The resurrection begins the reset. It is the reset button to fix the power of death to annul the "legal arrangement" that Yahweh had created in Deuteronomy 32, where the nations are put under other gods. When Christ rises from the dead, he is Yahweh incarnate. He becomes "The Seed" from Genesis 12:3 ("through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed"). He becomes that seed of Abraham that is the conduit, the gateway, through which the people of those nations can return back to the family of the Most High and to throw off the authority of the now-corrupt gods of the nations. That is Day of the Lord stuff, and in the New Testament it initiates with the resurrection and it will be consummated at the actual Day of the Lord (the final judgment) when the gods of the nations are displaced and replaced by believers who are put over the nations. So I don't think this is a reference in Ezekiel 30 to that. There's an immediate historical context for this. It's not the Day of the Lord kind of thing going on here, so that's why I don't think we're talking about the judgment of the particular god or gods of Egypt in that sense in this passage. Verse 22... one more comment here:

²² **Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt and will break his arms, both the strong arm and the one that was broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand.**

Just a word on "arm" here. The arm imagery is used a number of times in this chapter proceeding on from verse 22 here. "Strengthen the arms" of this or that nation, this or that person, Pharaoh, Babylon, whatever. We don't want to overly literalize this. I think most readers are going to realize this, but you might still be wondering, "Okay, what's with the arm imagery?" Well, again the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery... I'll read you a couple of excerpt statements from that.

Both the arm and the hand are biblical images of power. Typically such images suggest power toward a purpose, although the agent may be either divine or human. For example, the psalmist praises the Lord, whose “arm is endued with power” [MH: it's an anthropomorphic image] (Ps 89:13 NIV); but elsewhere he pleads with God to “break the arm of the wicked and evil man” (Ps 10:15) who preys upon the weak.

So the psalmist might have had a bigger problem with the wicked man than just, “Oh, go break that guy's arm and make it hurt for a while.” No, the reference is to more than that. The reference is to judge this evil guy. Remove this obstacle, this evil person, who is my enemy, who is being hostile to me. It could have been in any range of difficulties; this wicked person that the psalmist is thinking of could have been troubling him for any number of reasons. It's not just to inflict physical injury, but it's basically asking God to deal with this wicked person. “Take their power away.”

Depending on context the images of the arm or hand can represent power in action, either good or evil.

Dominating all else is the epithet “outstretched arm” (nearly twenty references, e.g., Ex 6:6 and 15:16; Deut 4:34). Whenever this formulaic phrase appears, it is always in reference to the power of God. This image can apply to God's power in creation, in the deliverance of his people or in his judgment.

But God's outstretched arm also functions as a picture of divine judgment [MH: not just judgment on earth, but divine judgment]. In response to Israel's idolatry, God allows the Babylonians to take Jerusalem, proclaiming, “I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in anger and fury and great wrath” (Jer 21:5). The image is powerfully ironic: the very power of God that brought Israel into being is now allied with Babylon toward her defeat.

I think you get the idea. When we read about the outstretched arm, this is an idiom that the Bible uses generally for the power of God. Elsewhere, just the reference to “arms” (someone's arm) can be power—either for a wicked person or a good person. It's just a generic idiom for any sort of power that one exerts over someone else. So I wanted to say a few words about that.

1:05:00

The rest of Ezekiel 30... that reference to the arm basically puts us almost at the end of the chapter anyway. Again, it's just a rehearsal of the bad stuff that's going to happen to Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar is coming to get you and you're in heap-big trouble.

We're going to stop there, because in the next two chapters, we're going to repeat some of these ideas (like Pharaoh is going to be judged), but we're going to get into some very heady up-to-our-knees in ancient Near Eastern cosmological cosmic sort of divine council thinking with respect to Pharaoh and what's going to happen to Pharaoh and how Pharaoh is cast. Ultimately, the scene is going to shift to the underworld and we're going to get into more of these things. A lot of it's going to remind you of Isaiah 14. I don't think that's coincidental; I think that's deliberate on the part of Ezekiel. Again, we're in a section with this whole matrix of ideas in which God is using divine rebellion and judgment and now we're going to get references to Sheol (the realm of the dead) as part of how all these events are being cast on the way to reviving Israel—resurrecting Israel—and its future. Ezekiel is soon going to be veering away from the oracles against the nations and veering into this "Israel has a future. These other nations, not so much. But Israel has an amazing future ahead of her."

So we're almost at that transition point, but we've got to go through some of the dark stuff in the next two chapters.

TS: I'm looking forward to that, Mike. I'm always amazed at how interesting the text itself is. You don't need to add to it or anything like that. Just the text itself—all the stuff that we're talking about and the stuff that's coming up. It's the ultimate story: good versus evil. It grabs your attention—for me, personally.

MH: Yeah, back in literature class... this is an epic. That's the best word for it. It's epic literature.

TS: It's the *best* epic literature! (laughing)

MH: Yep. Supernatural epic.

TS: All right, Mike. Next week we continue with Ezekiel.

MH: 31 and 32

TS: I'm going to be reaching out to the winners of our contest that ended January 31st. So I just want to let everybody know that here in the next day or so I'm going to be reaching out to those people. I have chosen them, so let me reach out to them and we'll give a shout-out to them in the next podcast.

MH: I'm in a little suspense here, too, because you haven't spilled any beans to me, either!

TS: You've just got to wait until everybody else, right? You've just got to listen to the next show.

MH: I guess so! (laughter)

TS: Is there anything else you'd like to mention for this show?

MH: No. Congratulations once again to David, but I think we're done.

TS: Sounds good. All right, well go check us out on Facebook if you don't mind. With that, Mike, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.